

# ACTION

OF THE

CHURCH IN FRANKLIN, MASS., *Cong. Church*

IN REGARD TO THE

American Tract Society

AND THE

AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

New-York:

J. A. GRAY, PRINTER, 95 & 97 CLIFF STREET, COR. FRANKFORT.

1854

(P13)

*Slavery in the U.S.*

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*From The Congregationalist, Boston.*

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MESSRS. EDITORS: I have been instructed by the church in this place, to forward the accompanying Report to your paper for publication. The Committee did not pretend to present a full discussion of the subject, but to indicate, as briefly as possible, the general character of the facts in the case, with the general line of argument, which have led to the conclusion adopted.

In explanation of the fact that no allusion is made to the Nebraska iniquity, I would state, that it was adopted some two months since, before the bill was introduced into the United States Senate. The same fact will explain the absence of some other remarks, which would have been pertinent at this time. I would merely add, that it was adopted with but one dissenting vote.

S. H.

FRANKLIN, March 1, 1854.

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The undersigned, chosen a Committee to ascertain the facts concerning the relation of the American Tract Society and the A.B.C.F.M. to American Slavery, consider the bearing of these facts upon our duties to those Societies, and recommend such action as shall seem most consonant with the principles of the Gospel and the claims of the *oppressed*, beg leave to present the following *Report*.

At the very outset of the inquiry, the Committee encounter difficulties in the way of calm and honest examination of the subject, growing out of the greatness and importance of the "vexed question" at issue, combined with the tender interest and almost sacred associations that gather round these

venerable institutions. Our memory hardly reaches the time when we did not look upon them both as hardly less than synonymous of that lovely and diffusive spirit of benevolence which is the very essence of the Gospel. Indeed, it is but very recently that we have yielded to the conviction, that questionable measures were adopted, and that a temporizing policy had taken the place of an inflexible adherence to principle in their management. Even now, it requires a struggle for us to believe that a Board, formed to send the Gospel to the heathen abroad, should deliberately ignore the existence of three millions of heathen at home; or that a Society whose aim is to scatter abroad its precious leaves for the healing of the nations, should, with cool and calculating forethought, refuse to send one for the healing of the poor slave, or make one effort to emancipate him from his bondage. But facts, and not our prejudices and sympathies, should be the objects of our heed—the principles of the Gospel, and not the maxims of Church or State, our rules of judgment and action.

The resolution, under which we were chosen, having primary reference to the *facts* in the case, we will in the *first* place briefly set them forth—a work of little difficulty, inasmuch as both Societies, having the matter long under consideration, have both deliberately and publicly taken their position. Concerning the A.B.C.F.M. and its teachings, we think we are doing it no injustice when we apply to it the language of one of its secretaries, respecting their missionaries among the Indians: “It does not seem to have been their aim to exert any direct influence, either by their private or public teachings, upon the subject of slavery.” On the great question of the age, it aims to be non-committal, and, in words at least, withhold its testimony against the giant sin of the land. Its *acts*, however, are not so equivocal. Here, if we mistake not, its vast influence is on the side of the oppressor, and against the oppressed. And by this we do not mean that it has allied itself to the *slavery propagandists* of the South, but that, so far as it acts at all—and from the very nature of its position it *must* act—its acts go to bolster up the infamous institution, and afford an opiate to the consciences of those who are implicated in it. It makes no discrimination between slaveholders and non-slaveholders, admitting both to its councils and to churches under its care, and employing missionaries who either own or hire slaves. In its report upon the missions among the Cherokees and Choctaws, [1842,] it says with the strongest emphasis of the latter, that they have a “good GOVERNMENT,” while a law upon their statute-book distinctly declared, that “if one, acting as a missionary or preacher, \* \* is found to take an active part in favoring the principles and notions of the most destructive and fatal doctrine of the abolitionist, he shall be compelled to leave the nation and for ever stay out of it;” while, by another law of that same “good government,” it is enacted, that “if a free negro shall return to the nation, he shall be sold to the highest bidder for life.” Of the former it is said, with equal emphasis, they have an “EXCELLENT GOVERNMENT.” And yet that government declared, that “Whosoever teaches a slave or free negro \* \* to read or write shall be fined from \$100 to \$500.” In this very Report,

other evils and hindrances in the way of the Indian's advancement are referred to, but not a word is said upon the evil or hindrances which slavery presents; and, although it was known that great interest and anxiety were felt upon the subject, but a single allusion, and that not of doubt or regret, is made to it, or any hope expressed of its future removal. In a word, upon this subject, which divides the country, the American Board has deliberately taken a position which is a grief to the avowed friends of freedom, and perfectly satisfactory to the abettor of slavery.

The Tract Society has placed itself in the same category, and committed itself to the same policy. Not only has it never, among the multitudinous issues of its press, published *one tract* or volume upon the subject of slavery, but it has adopted the strange and disingenuous course of suppressing passages, in its republished works, which refer to it; so that nothing shall be found in any of their publications which shall grate harshly on the ears of its Southern readers and pastors; and when remonstrated with for such delinquency, one of its secretaries replied, defending its course, and intimating that *silence on the subject of slavery* was the settled policy of the Society, avowing that "it would be the sacrifice of a greater to a lesser good to engage in the discussion of a topic already exhausted, with the likelihood of satisfying none, and with the certainty of alienating our best friends."

Such being the obvious and admitted facts of the case, the question now arises: What are the duties which such a decision imposes upon this church? To this question your Committee have given a patient and earnest examination, anxious if possible to arrive at such a conclusion as conscience shall approve, and our duty to "every creature" shall demand. Claiming for ourselves the right of private and independent judgment, we as readily concede a similar right to others, while we admit that they may as honestly as ourselves arrive at opposite conclusions. Still, looking at the subject with the best light we have, we can reach no other conviction than that all farther support of these societies, in their present position, is incompatible with the higher claims of right and humanity. We shall now proceed very briefly to indicate our reasons for this conclusion.

I. The course adopted by the American Board and American Tract Society, recognizes a distinction in favor of this particular sin, which is not warranted by the Scriptures. There is a general conviction and admission, that the system of American slavery is wrong. Although there may be some difference of opinion, as to some particular points involved in it—as, for instance, whether or not slavery is a *malum per se*, or whether or not it is possible for a man, under any circumstances, to be justified in holding a slave;—yet, on these general subjects, there is little doubt of the grievous wrong involved in the system. Why, then, should it not be treated as a wrong? If it is a sin, let it be so regarded, and let every motive Christianity affords be brought to bear upon the consciences of those implicated in it. Let it take its place, in the teachings of the pulpit, the press, and our benevolent societies, among its kindred vices of intemperance, licentiousness, and Sabbath desecration. We claim no right of interfering with the internal arrangements of the Southern States. We simply contend for the right and

duty of calling things by their right names, and bringing the sanction of an outraged morality to bear upon the accursed system, in every way that a wisely-directed philanthropy may indicate; and it is because these societies do not lend their influence against it, that we recommend the withdrawal of our confidence and support from them.

II. We see, in action like that we recommend, the only reasonable ground of hope for the slave. We say this because it contemplates ecclesiastical action; because its aim is to array the Christianity of the nation, the moral power of the Church, against slavery. Hitherto, other plans of effort have been made; but without any very gratifying success. There has been a good deal of agitation, much feeling—much bad feeling has been excited, a formidable show of resistance has been *made*, several schemes have been adopted, and yet slavery has gathered strength all the time, every year becoming more insolent in its demands, and yet has had its every demand granted, extended its area, and more thoroughly impregnated the legislature of the land with its infernal spirit than ever before. No doubt needful work has been done. And yet, it seems but the work of *preparation*, important in its place, but ineffective toward accomplishing the great result. There have been *anti-slavery* conventions and anti-slavery societies, a “Liberty party” and a “Free-Soil party,” while large amounts have been expended in the circulation of anti-slavery documents. And yet there is probably less public feeling upon the subject now than there was a few years since, and so far as political strength is concerned, there is far less now than there was two or three years ago. And this apathy is the more significant and alarming, because it follows so closely upon the most daring and successful inroads of the slave power. Texas has been annexed, the Mexican war has been fought, and the Fugitive-Slave Bill has been enacted, with all their cost of infamy, blood, and treasure, and yet the public mind is settling down into an unmurmuring acquiescence in what is deemed inevitable. Of course mere anti-slavery societies will languish, political organizations will fail of success, and efforts in these directions will be intermitted. And the reason for this failure is found in the *motives* which have actuated too many who have enlisted in these forms of anti-slavery action.

From the mere impulse of sympathy for the oppressed and indignation against the oppressor, the love of agitation for its own sake, or the hope of political success or aggrandizement, great numbers have hitherto acted. But sympathy and indignation, although powerful for the moment, lose their energy by the lapse of time; agitation, for its own sake, wears out and loses its zest; while they who embarked in the cause for political prominence and preferment, will desert it when they fail of securing the object of their aim. The great want of the anti-slavery movement has been the *conscience* of the nation. Although its moral features are its most prominent and ruling features, it is a sad thought, that the religion of the nation has not been arrayed on its side. Many noble exceptions there have been and are now; but for the position that the Church, as a whole, has not been on the side of the oppressed, there is too much evidence. With a bad spirit and an evil

aim, the American Church has been styled the bulwark of American slavery ; and men seeing that spirit and aim, have dismissed the remark as a libel, without looking into the matter to ascertain how much foundation there is in fact for it. And yet, we have no less authority than that of Rev. Albert Barnes for the assertion, that "There is no power out of the Church that could sustain slavery an hour, if it were not sustained in it." The Church, with its three millions of members, and its more than half a million of voters, if arrayed against it, must so weaken as ultimately to destroy. And never was there a time when the help of conscience and the religious element was more needed. Other means are failing, mere worldly expedients have been found wanting in that persistence which the removal of such an evil demands. Let the Church come to the rescue ; let Christians withdraw all countenance and support ; let the conscience of the nation be arrayed against the system of oppression ; and there is yet hope for the slave. Permit things to remain as they are, and no ray of hope dawns for him in the future. But how shall Christians bring the force of their opposition to bear upon the accursed institution ? Many ways suggest themselves. The only one, we are careful now to mention, is that proposed in the Report, the withdrawal of their confidence and support from those benevolent societies that ignore the claims of the slave. Let the churches of the North do that, and the same sentiment and moral power that impels them to do this, will invent and put in requisition other means for the furtherance of the same purpose. And it is *country* churches, Christians in the rural districts, acting on their own independent rights and responsibilities, that must take the lead. Metropolitan churches, ecclesiastical dignitaries, are too near the fountain of commercial and political influence, and too much dependent upon them, to take the first step. They may follow, when the country churches set themselves right, and assume their true position.

III. The only remaining reason we would urge for withdrawing our support from the American Board and Tract Society, is *the importance of sustaining those societies whose main object is the same, and which have taken the true position upon the subject of slavery.* The course pursued by the other societies has alienated the confidence and support of thousands, who will no longer contribute to their funds. These contributions would be entirely lost to the cause of benevolence, at least to these departments of benevolent effort, unless channels can be opened, uncontaminated by all complicity with American slavery. To gather up these funds, which would otherwise be lost to a common cause, the American Missionary Association and the "Reform Book and Tract Society" have been formed. Both your Committee deem worthy of confidence ; and both appeal for support, to that portion of the Christian and benevolent community whose existence called them into being. If, therefore, there are those who believe, that the Board and Tract Society occupy questionable ground, that they are too much implicated with the dark system of oppression which disgraces our land and age, then it seems to us that they should lend their influence and support to the new Society. We do not doubt that the old Societies are doing good, and we rejoice in that good. They, however, have all the advantage

of age and preëminence of the ground; they have the *prestige* of rank, wealth, and conservatism, and are certain of support from those classes, in the Church and community, who have compelled them to occupy and maintain their present position. The cities and central influences of the Church are arrayed in their support. The new societies must depend upon the scattered elements of feeling, as they are more generally diffused through the country churches and congregations. Of course, *relatively*, it seems to us, they have stronger claims upon our support. Granting, therefore, that our sympathies, and the tender associations of the past, bind us strongly to the old societies—granting, too, that they are doing good, it seems to us that the claims of the new societies are paramount, and should receive our support.

If, however, there are those who do not look at the matter in the same light with us, we would still recognize the claim of the old organization, and would recommend that equal opportunity be given to contribute to them as to the new. All of which is respectfully submitted.